The Kentucky Commonwealth Virtual University organized a two-day summit where leaders of virtual education systems from across the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Mexico assembled for the first time. The summit was held at the Marriott Griffin Gate in Lexington, Kentucky, April 13-14, 2000. One of the purposes of the meeting was to form strategic alliances in the virtual education environment. Invitees were executive officers of systemwide, statewide, and countrywide institutions.

In order to meet the demand for a quality e-learning, summit attendees agreed to establish an informal association that would focus on topics such as public policy, marketplace, barriers to mobility, financial aid, and research and expertise. It has been named "The Lexington Group."   The attendees signed a Memorandum of Agreement (attached). The agreement pledged to encourage transfer arrangements and other types of collaboration among their institutions. William Graves, CEO of Eduprise, which sponsored the event, volunteered to build and maintain a website and electronic forum for the group.

Leaders of various other virtual institutions who were unable to attend the summit have since signed the Memorandum of Agreement bringing the current number of signatures to 31. News of the meeting and agreement appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education and on National Public Radio.

Three national associations (Southern Regional Education Board, EDUCAUSE, and Western Cooperative for Education Technology) have invited the Lexington Group to affiliate with them.

Governor Paul E. Patton welcomed the group to Kentucky at the opening of the event April 13.   Mr. Barclay Knapp, President and CEO of NTL Inc., a leading communications company in the United Kingdom, delivered the keynote address at the evening banquet.

Staff Preparation by Mary Beth Susman and Taffie Wright

Virtual Education Executives' Memorandum of Agreement
April 14, 2000
Lexington, Kentucky

Whereas, the leaders assembled for the first virtual education executive officers' International Summit are dedicated to:

- Promoting anywhere, anytime learning;

- The ability for students to make informed decisions about options in anywhere, anytime learning;

- Abolishing unnecessary barriers to the beginning, continuation, or completion of personal education goals; and

Whereas, the assembled leaders value the learner as customer; the new market-place of 21st Century economies; the employer expectations for documented skilled graduates; and

Whereas, the assembled leaders desire to:

- Create seamless mobility and choice for customers;

- Expand the opportunities for lifelong learning and access to that learning;

- Collaborate with like-minded institutions, corporations, and agencies to fulfill their mission,

The assembled leaders (undersigned) do hereby agree to:

- Encourage articulation and transfer agreements that serve the life-long learner;

- Publish and promote articulation and transfer agreements through their own resources; and

- Continue dialogues with collaborating partners to refine and update agreements as appropriate.

Memorandum of Agreement Signed By:
Athabasca University
Colorado Electronic Community College
Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium
e-University of Great Britain
Georgia G.L.O.B.E.
Harcourt Higher Education
Illinois Virtual Campus
Jones International University
Kentucky Commonwealth Virtual University
Kentucky Virtual High School
Magellan University
Maryland Online
Michigan Virtual University
Minnesota Virtual University
Monterrey Tech Virtual University
National Technological University
New Jersey Virtual University
Ohio Learning Network
Online College of Oklahoma
South Dakota Electronic University Consortium
Tennessee Board of Regents@Renaissance Center Virtual Education
Tennessee Virtual University
The Florida On-Line High School
The University of Texas System
UNET, University of Maine System
Universidad Regiomontana, Mexico
University of Phoenix
University of Tennessee
US Open University
Western Governors University
Wisconsin Learning Innovation

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<u>**INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**</u>

Virtual Universities Pledge to Ease Transfer and Encourage Other Kinds of Collaboration

BY JEFFREY R. YOUNG

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS from 28 virtual universities around the world have signed an agreement pledging to encourage transfer arrangements and other types of collaboration among their institutions. The agreement was one result of a two-day summit for virtual-university leaders organized by the Kentucky Commonwealth Virtual University.

"We have to cooperate in order to grow the business," said Mary Beth Susman, chief executive officer of the Kentucky university.

SEAMLESS TRANSFER

The intent of the accord is that students taking courses online will one day be able to transfer their course credits seamlessly from one virtual university to another. That would make it easier for students to earn degrees by weaving offerings from a number of online providers.

The agreement is largely symbolic, however, since some of the leaders who signed it don't have the authority to set policy on transferring credits. Kentucky's virtual university, for instance, doesn't deliver its own courses, but instead provides support services for colleges in the state that deliver distance education. Those institutions determine what course credits they will accept from other colleges.

But even a pledge to cooperate is unusual considering that, in many ways, the institutions are competitors. One theme of the summit was that online universities have much to gain by working together.

The leaders also discussed other ways that virtual universities might work together, such as buying equipment and software in groups.

"NoW we have a network of people," said Cathy Guna, director of the Illinois Virtual Campus.

Leaders from 22 institutions signed the agreement at the summit, and six other, institutions joined later.

The signers of the accord are:

Athabasca University (Canada) Colorado Electronic Community College
Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium
E-University (Great Brtiain)
Florida Online High School
Georgia G.L.O.B.E.
Illinois Virtual University
Jones International University
Kentucky Commonwealth Virtual University
Kentucky Virtual High School
Magellan University
Maryland Online
Michigan Virtual University
Minnesota Virtual University
National Technological University
New Jersey Virtual University
Ohio Learning Network
Online College of Oklahoma
South Dakota Electronic University Consortium
Tennessee Virtual University
UNET, University of Maine System
U.S. Open University
Universidad Regiomontana (Mex.)
University of Phoenix
University of Tennessee
University of Texas System
Western Governors University
Wisconsin Learning Innovations

http://chronicle.comlfree1200010412000041801U.htm

Leaders of 22 Virtual Universities Sign Pledge to Cooperate

By JEFFREY R. YOUNG

Executive officers from 22 virtual universities across North America signed an agreement Friday pledging to encourage transfer arrangements and other types of collaboration among their institutions. The agreement was one result of a two-day summit for virtual-university leaders organized by the Kentucky Commonwealth Virtual University.

"We have to cooperate in order to grow the business," said Mary Beth Susman, chief executive officer of the Kentucky university, in an interview Monday.

The intent of the agreement is that students taking courses online will one day be able to transfer their course credits seamlessly from one virtual university to another, said Ms. Susman. That would make it easier for students to get a degree by cobbling together offerings from a number of online providers.

The agreement is largely symbolic however, since some of the leaders who signed it don't have the authority to set policy on transferring credits. Kentucky's virtual university, for instance, doesn't deliver its own courses, but instead provides support services for colleges and universities in the state that are involved in distance education. Those institutions determine what course credits they will accept from other colleges and universities.

But even a pledge to cooperate is unusual considering that, in many ways, the 22 institutions are competitors in cyberspace. One theme of the summit was that virtual universities have much to gain by working together.

"The colleges and universities who accept each other's credits, those are the colleges and universities that will be the best survivors in this environment," Ms. Susman added.

The leaders who attended the summit also discussed other ways that virtual universities might work together, such as buying equipment and software in groups and sharing best-practice information and research.

For Cathy Gunn, director of the Illinois Virtual Campus, the most valuable part of the two day summit was talking with her peers from other institutions. She said the meeting was the first time that so many virtual-university leaders had gathered in one place.

"I really need to talk to other people who are going through the same things that I am,"

said Ms. Gunn. "Now we have a network of people."

The leaders tentatively agreed to start an association of virtual-university executive officers, though details have not yet been worked out.